

Message Text

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ACTION AF-06

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 AID-05 OMB-01 OC-05 CCO-00 SAM-01 ACDA-05

TRSE-00 SAJ-01 IO-10 A-01 EB-07 /100 W
----- 046603

P R 141412Z JUL 75

FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2837

INFO AMEMBASSY LAGOS

AMCONSUL KADUNA

AMCONSUL IBADAN

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 LONDON 10727

FROM AMBASSADOR EASUM

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, NI, US

SUBJECT: US-NIGERIAN RELATIONSHIPS POST-MOLONEY

1. SUMMARY: FMG'S 24-HOUR OCCUPATION OF EMBASSY ANNEX PREMISES JULY 9 NOT REPEAT NOT INDICATIVE OF SUDDEN OR DEEPER MALAISE IN BASIC STATE OF US-NIGERIAN RELATIONS. TROOP ACTION MUCH MORE THE PRODUCT OF PERSONAL FRUSTRATION ON PART OF BRIGADIER OBASANJO. HOWEVER, MOUNTING PROBLEMS WITHIN NIGERIAN BUREAUCRACY AND SOCIETY, COMBINED WITH ONGOING NIGERIAN UNHAPPINESS WITH SOME US ACTIONS AND POLICIES, COULD PRODUCE MORE SERIOUS PROBLEMS FOR US IN FUTURE. CONTINUED PUBLICITY ON CIA CONTROVERSIES INCREASES VULNERABILITY OF FBIS INSTALLATIONS AT KADUNA. IMPORTANT POSITIVE ELEMENTS IN OUR RELATIONSHIP NONETHELESS REMAIN STRONG AND OFFER OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVING COMMUNICATION AND TIES. EMBASSY'S TENTATIVE THOUGHTS ALONG THESE LINES TO BE DISCUSSED WITH DEPARTMENT DURING MY CONSULTATION PERIOD. END SUMMARY.

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2. FOLLOWING ANALYSIS IS RESPONSE TO DEPARTMENT'S REQUEST FOR EMBASSY LAGOS VIEWS ON WHAT LAY BEHIND JULY 9 MILITARY OCCUPATION OF EMBASSY ANNEX PROPERTY. WHILE MOST OF LANGUAGE IN THIS TELEGRAM IS MINE AND WITHOUT BENEFIT OF ACCESS TO FILES OR COLLEAGUES, ANALYSIS DRAWS ON INTENSIVE LAGOS COUNTRY TEAM REVIEW OVER PAST SEVERAL WEEKS OF THE STATE OF US-NIGERIAN BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP. REVIEW INCLUDED FOUR CONSECUTIVE EVENING MEETINGS WITH SOME HUNDRED PRINCIPAL REPRESENTATIVES OF AMERICAN BUSINESS AND FINANCIAL COMMUNITY AS WELL AS WIDE VARIETY OF TALKS WITH KEY NIGERIAN CONTACTS BOTH BEFORE AND AFTER BRIGADIER OBASANJO'S MANEUVER AT MOLONEY STREET.

3. ATTEMPT TO ASSESS WHAT MOTIVATED OBASANJO TO SEND IN HIS TROOPS TAKES ONE WELL BEYOND A SIMPLE ANSWER TO A SIMPLE QUESTION. THE SIMPLE EXPLANATION IS FRUSTRATION. OBASANJO IS A YOUNG STRONG-WILLED EGOCENTRIC MEMBER OF THE FEDERAL EXECUTIVE COUNCIL WHO IS HIGHLY REGARDED FOR LEADERSHIP QUALITIES DISPLAYED DURING THE CIVIL WAR AND WHO STILL COMMANDS HIS OWN ENGINEERING BATTALION TROOPS. AS HOUSING AND WORKS COMMISSIONER, HE TAKES SERIOUSLY HIS RESPONSIBILITY FOR FINDING SOLUTIONS TO CRITICAL AND URGENT FMG OFFICE SPACE PROBLEM. WHY SHOULD FOREIGN DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS BE HOUSED IN LUXURY WHEN OFFICERS OF THE NIGERIAN GOVERNMENT ARE IN RABBIT WARRENS? HE ISSUED AN EVICTION NOTICE ON OUR ANNEX THREE MONTHS AGO, FOLLOWING IT UP TWO MONTHS LATER WITH A SHORT-FUSE ONE-WEEK DEADLINE - AND YET NO ONE MOVED. UNACCUSTOMED TO FAILURE, AND RESENTING WHAT HE SAW AS A CONTINUING AND PUBLICLY EVIDENT FLOUTING OF A SOVEREIGN GOVERNMENT'S REPEATED INSTRUCTIONS, HE LOST PATIENCE.

4. RELATIVELY UNSOPHISTICATED SOLDIER THAT HE IS, OBASANJO NEITHER UNDERSTOOD NOR CARED ABOUT NICETIES OF DIPLOMATIC PRACTICE. EVEN IF HE FOUND CREDIBLE THE ASSURANCE I GAVE HIM JUNE 10 THAT WE WOULD VACATE, HIS ASSOCIATES DOUBTLESS REMINDED HIM OUR TRACK RECORD WAS POOR. NOR WAS HE INTERESTED IN CHECKING WITH CIVILIAN-LED MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS TO FIND OUT THE STATUS OF ONGOING EMBASSY MEA DISCUSSIONS. HE HAD LITTLE CONFIDENCE

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IN ABILITY OF MEA CIVILIANS TO PRODUCE RESULTS. COMMISSIONER ARIKPO IS INEFFECTUAL AND RARELY ON SEAT ANYWAY, WHEREAS IYALLA IS SEEN AS AN AMBITIOUS SCHEMER, VAIN, ENIGMATIC, UNPREDICTABLE, AND GENERALLY ANTIPATHETIC TO MILITARY'S STYLE OF PROBLEM SOLVING. OBASANJO WANTED TO MAKE SURE OUR MOVE WOULD TAKE PLACE WITHOUT FURTHER PROCRASTINATION, AND HE THOUGHT HIS PLOY WOULD WORK.

5. IN FACT, THE PLOY DID WORK, ALTHOUGH THE RESULTS MAY NOT HAVE BEEN IN PRECISELY THE FORM OBASANJO EXPECTED. WHETHER HE FEELS HE EMERGED AS THE GOAT OR THE HERO REMAINS TO BE SEEN. AT ANY RATE, THE HEAD OF STATE'S PERSONAL DISMAY AT HIS ACTION PROVIDED MEA THE CONFIDENCE AND PROD IT NEEDED TO RESPOND ALBEIT BELATEDLY TO THE

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USIA-06 AID-05 OMB-01 OC-05 CCO-00 SAM-01 ACDA-05

TRSE-00 SAJ-01 IO-10 A-01 EB-07 /100 W

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P R 141412Z JUL 75

FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2838

INFO AMEMBASSY LAGOS

AMCONSUL KADUNA

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EMBASSY'S WEEK-PENDING REQUEST FOR NEGOTIATIONS. THE DEPARTMENT KNOWS THE STORY FROM THAT POINT ON.

6. SO MUCH FOR THE SIMPLE ANSWER. BUT BENEATH AND GOING BEYOND IT ARE BASIC PROBLEMS THAT CONTINUE TO LOOM AS OBSTACLES TO IMPROVED RELATIONS. ONE OF THEM IS SUGGESTED BY A MORE CAREFUL LOOK AT OBASANJO HIMSELF. NOTWITHSTANDING HIS USUAL REPUTATION AS JOVIAL AND OPENLY PRO-AMERICAN, OBASANJO HAS IN THE PAST EXPRESSED STRONG FEELINGS ON AMERICAN POLICIES IN AFRICA. HE IS REPORTEDLY DEEPLY COMMITTED TO THE AFRICAN LIBERATION STRUGGLE; HE HAS DISCOUNTED THE PROSPECTS OF COOPERATION WITH THE "WHITE-CONTROLLED" WORLD AND PRIOR TO APRIL 1974 HAD AC-

CUSED NATO OF ENCOURAGING, ARMING AND FINANCING PORTUGAL TO CARRY OUT SUPPRESSION AND GENOCIDE. HE IS SAID TO BELIEVE THAT IN A SHOWDOWN THE US AND NATO WOULD BE ALLIES OF SOUTH AFRICA AND RHODESIA. THIS PERCEPTION OF WORLD POLITICAL ALIGNMENTS IS COMMON IN NIGERIA, AND WE DETECT MORE OF IT NOW IN THE AFTERMATH OF MOZAMBIQUE INDEPENDENCE, THE CONTINUING UNCERTAINTIES IN RHODESIA, AND THE US VETO ON NAMIBIA. ONE CAN SPECULATE THEREFORE THAT
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OBASANJO ACTED NOT ONLY BECAUSE HE WAS UNDER PRESSURE ON THE OFFICE SPACE QUESTION, BUT BECAUSE HE HAD LOST SYMPATHY WITH US ON MORE FUNDAMENTAL ISSUES AND FELT THAT IF WE ENDED UP IN THE STREET IT WOULD SERVE US RIGHT. ARE THERE GOING TO BE MORE OBASANJOS?

7. WE HAVE ALSO ASKED OURSELVES WHETHER THE FMG MAY HAVE CONCEIVED OF THE MOLONEY STREET ISSUE AS A DIVERSIONARY TACTIC TO DISTRACT PUBLIC ATTENTION FROM GROWING PROBLEMS ELSEWHERE. THE LIST IS IMPRESSIVE: INCREDIBLE PORT CONGESTION (BETWEEN 150 AND 200 SHIPS WAITING) AND NO VIABLE REMEDIES IN SIGHT, DECLINING OIL REVENUES, SHORTAGES OF REFINED PRODUCTS, CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS BEHIND SCHEDULE, CHAOTIC STATE OF PLANNING FOR FESTAC II, TELEPHONE SYSTEM A DISASTER, ERRATIC POWER SUPPLY, IRON AND STEEL COMPLEX STILLBORN, LNG DISCUSSIONS BOGGING DOWN AS FMG DEMANDS ESCALATE, INCREASING CALLS FOR TRANSFER OF THE CAPITAL TO KADUNA AS LAGOS CONGESTION BECOMES WORSE DAILY, HOUSING AND OFFICE SPACE VIRTUALLY UNOBTAINABLE, INFLATION ANYWHERE FROM THIRTY TO EIGHTY PERCENT A YEAR. THERE IS WIDESPREAD CONCERN ABOUT FINDING THE TEACHERS TO TRAIN THOSE THOUSANDS REQUIRED BY THE UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION PROGRAM. CENSUS FIGURES REMAIN A CONTROVERSIAL AND POLITICALLY EXPLOSIVE SECRET. THE EXPECTED BUT STILL POSTPONED DECISION ON NEW STATES AND GOVERNORS ADDS INSTABILITY PARTICULARLY IN THE NORTH AND EAST. FINALLY, CORRUPTION THROUGHOUT THE BUREAUCRACY, BOTH CIVILIAN AND MILITARY, APPEARS MORE AND MORE PREVALENT AND OPEN.

8. FMG'S FRUSTRATION AT INABILITY TO COPE WITH THESE PROBLEMS MAY INDUCE A SUBLIMINAL FEELING OF INFERIORITY VIS A VIS FOREIGNERS. THIS WOULD BE COMPENSATED FOR BY A TENDENCY TO CHALLENGE FOREIGNERS AND AGGRESSIVELY ASSERT NIGERIAN AUTHORITY. WHILE WE DO NOT ON BALANCE BELIEVE THAT THE MOLONEY STREET AFFAIR IS IN THIS CATEGORY EXCEPT PERHAPS IN OBASANJO'S MIND, WE ARE CONCERNED THAT ANOTHER ISSUE MAY BE FOUND IN THE FUTURE THAT CAN BE MORE EFFECTIVELY EXPLOITED IN THIS CONTEXT. FOR EXAMPLE, CONTINUING PUBLIC CONTROVERSY ABOUT THE CIA COULD PRODUCE A CONCERTED MOVE TO EXPEL FBIS KADUNA. AS DEPARTMENT AWARE,

THE ISSUE HAS ALREADY APPEARED IN THE PRESS ON SEVERAL
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RECENT OCCASIONS. A TOP POLICE OFFICIAL HAS BEEN QUOTED

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INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 AID-05 OMB-01 OC-05 CCO-00 SAM-01 ACDA-05

TRSE-00 SAJ-01 IO-10 A-01 EB-07 /100 W
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P R 141412Z JUL 75
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
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ON THE NEED TO "DO SOMETHING ABOUT FBIS" BECAUSE SO MANY
QUESTIONS WERE BEING ASKED ABOUT IT. IF THE ISSUE RE-
MAINS ALIVE, WE ANTICIPATE NEGATIVE EFFECT ON NIGERIAN
ATTITUDES AND ON OUR RELATIONS WITH CONTACTS NEWLY FEAR-
FUL OF SURVEILLANCE BY FMG INTELLIGENCE ORGANIZATIONS.
SEVERAL AMERICAN BUSINESSMEN HAVE CALLED OUR ATTENTION TO
HEIGHTENED SENSITIVITIES ON THIS SCORE ON PART OF SOME OF
THEIR NIGERIAN ASSOCIATES, AND LOCAL EMPLOYEES OF USIS
HAVE EXPRESSED CONCERN OVER WHAT THEIR FRIENDS AND FAMI-
LIES ARE SAYING TO THEM ABOUT NEWSPAPER STORY THAT MALON-
EY STREET HOUSED CIA OFFICES THAT SPIED ON NEARBY FMG

CABINET SECRETARIAT.

9. THERE ARE OF COURSE OTHER ISSUES BETWEEN US THAT HAVE FURTHER COMPLICATED OUR DIALOGUE: IFI LOANS, GENERALIZED TARIFF PREFERENCES, AND OIL PRICES. NIGERIANS DON'T YET KNOW WHAT WE INTEND ON COMMODITY AGREEMENTS.

10. HAVING SAID ALL OF THE ABOVE, WE FIND IMPORTANT POSITIVE ELEMENTS THAT DISCOURAGE PESSIMISM CONCERNING THE FUTURE OF OUR RELATIONSHIP. THESE INCLUDE THE MANY IM-CONFIDENTIAL

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PORTANT EDUCATIONAL, CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC LINKS. IN PARTICULAR, NIGERIA'S ADMIRATION FOR AND DESIRE TO BENEFIT FROM US TECHNOLOGY, EDUCATION, AND MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES ARGUES STRONGLY FOR FMG EFFORTS TO MAINTAIN GOOD (AND PROFITABLE) RELATIONS. THIS IS REINFORCED BY NIGERIA'S BROADER AWARENESS OF THE US AS A MAJOR WORLD POWER AND A FEELING THAT IT IS IN PRINCIPLE BEST TO AVOID ANTAGONIZING SUCH A POWER. ON BALANCE, WE DO NOT SEE SIGNIFICANT CHANGE IN FMG ATTITUDES TOWARD THE US IN RECENT MONTHS, NOR DO WE BELIEVE THERE IS A DEEPER MALAISE DEVELOPING WITHIN THE NIGERIAN GOVERNMENT WITH REGARD TO THE US. WE HAVE NONETHELESS BEEN EXAMINING A VARIETY OF POSSIBLE OPTIONS OR INITIATIVES OPEN TO US FOR IMPROVING OUR IMAGE, AND I LOOK FORWARD TO CONVERSATIONS IN WASHINGTON ON THESE MATTERS DURING THE NEXT TWO WEEKS.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: FOREIGN RELATIONS, LEGATIONS, EMBASSIES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 14 JUL 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: MartinML
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975LONDON10727
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750242-0918
From: LONDON
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750759/aaaacapt.tel
Line Count: 310
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 6
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: MartinML
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 24 JUN 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <24 JUN 2003 by BoyleJA>; APPROVED <05 NOV 2003 by MartinML>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
06 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: US-NIGERIAN RELATIONSHIPS POST-MOLONEY
TAGS: PFOR, PINT, NI, US
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006